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MARVEL COMICS GROUP
#1 IN A FOUR-ISSUE LIMITED SERIES
SIX FROM SIRIUS™
by DOUG MOENCH and PAUL GULACY
GULACY ©83

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INTRODUCTION

by Archie Goodwin

Welcome to something special from **Epic Comics**. Unlike our other series, which are continuous and open-ended, this is our first Limited Series. **Six From Sirius** will be completed in four monthly issues. Sort of a super graphic novel, if you will. We also think it's special because of what Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy have accomplished with the project.

They created **Six From Sirius** three years ago as a proposed serial for **Epic Illustrated**, our deluxe format fantasy and science-fiction magazine. We had been receiving requests to reunite the team of Moench and Gulacy for a contribution. Hardly surprising. Their long stint on Marvel's **Master of Kung Fu** was a highpoint among comics produced in the Seventies, admired for the unique cohesiveness of Doug's words with Paul's images and for the way their approach to stories and characterization stretched the title's adventure-genre boundaries. We believe they've brought these same qualities to **Six From Sirius**, with the advantage of their own greater seasoning and experience plus being able to work without the kind of deadline pressures that contributed to Paul eventually giving up **Master of Kung Fu**.

Though he's kept his hand in at comics, Paul has been working mostly in advertising the last few years, doing comps, storyboards, and finished art. He has been able to incorporate techniques and skills developed in these areas into his already accomplished drawing and storytelling in ways that would have been impossible with a tight schedule. Doug, in his plotting, provided Paul with visual spurs and departure points for his art and imagery, created dialogue and narrative captions which not only complement the striking graphics, but enhance them with style and flair.

The impressive end result made us feel the project deserved to stand on its own. Spread out over the year or so it would have taken the full 120 pages to run serialized in **Epic Illustrated**, the intricate, multi-layered story would have suffered. But in the three years **Six From Sirius** was in progress, **Epic's** own situation had changed. We weren't just one magazine any longer. Thanks to the effort and planning of Marvel's Editor-in-Chief, Jim Shooter, we were an entire line of creator-owned comics. We could pick the format that showcased **Six From Sirius** best. It would have been too large and too expensive as one graphic novel, or even two. A Limited Series seemed best to deliver it to the largest number of readers and yet allow the continuity and flow its story required.

That's the project's history; its past. Time to show you the future. That's what **Six From Sirius** deals with. It's a future in which the human race has populated the stars. And yet, the crises and conflicts they face have distinct parallels with those of today. Only the *scale* of disaster has escalated; only the *magnitude* of the consequences has changed . . .

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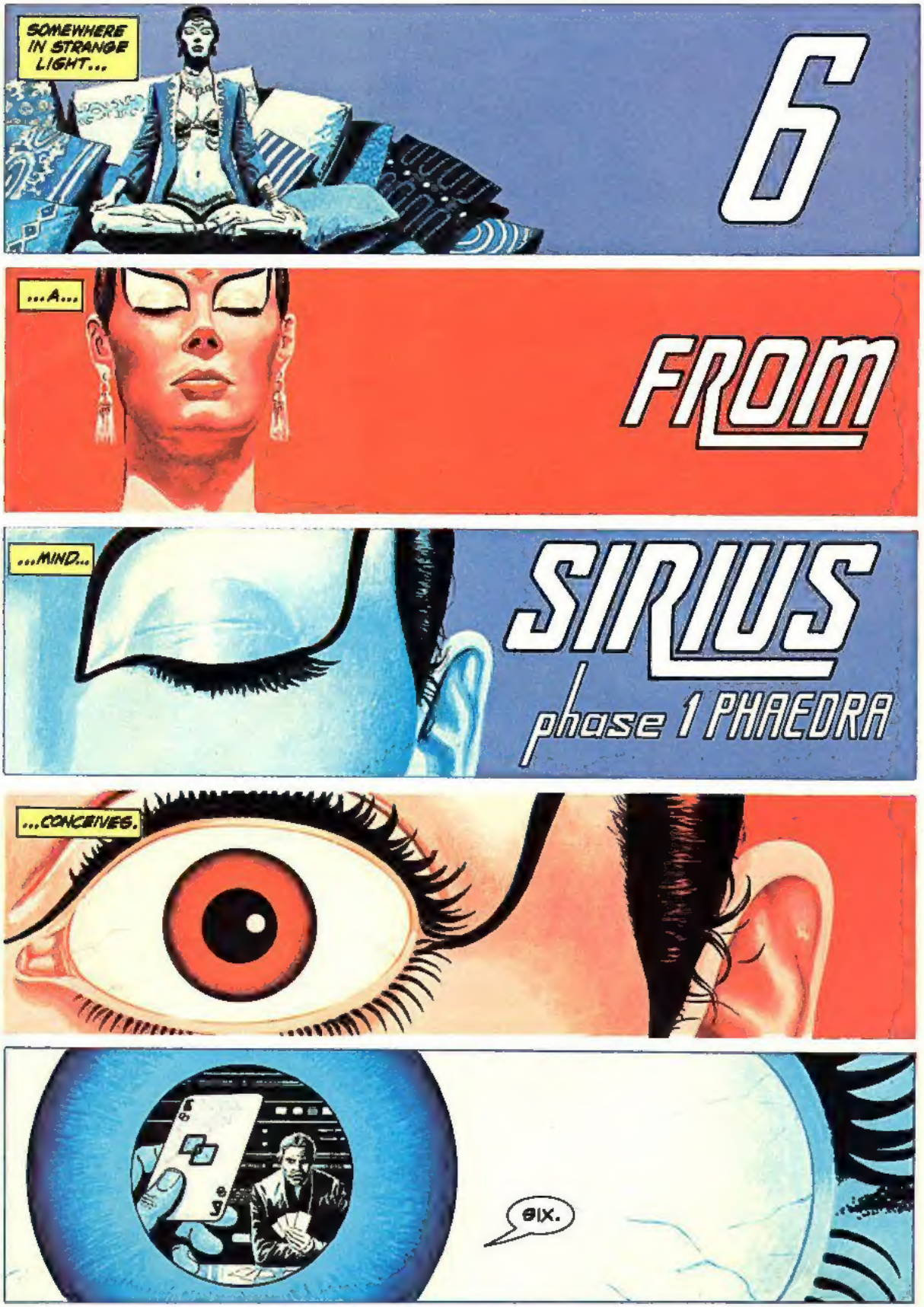
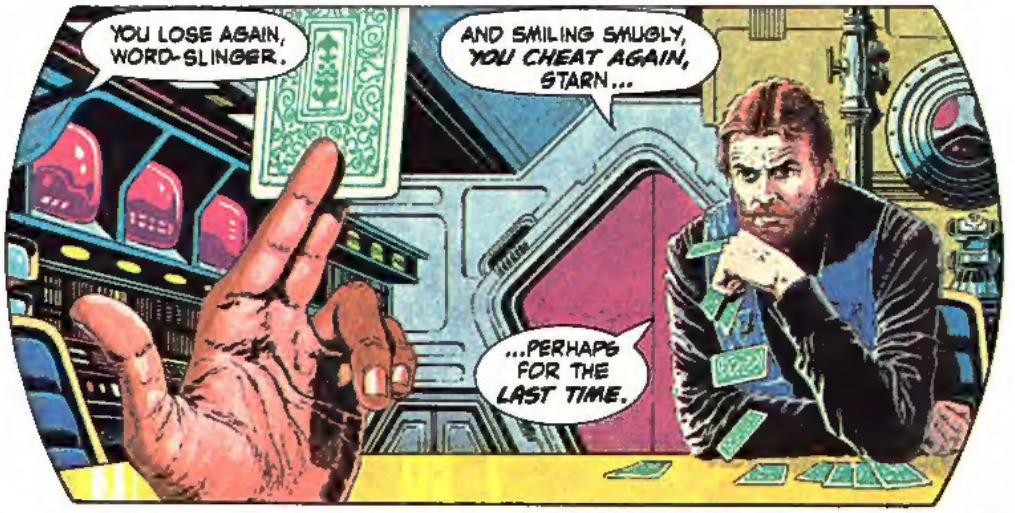
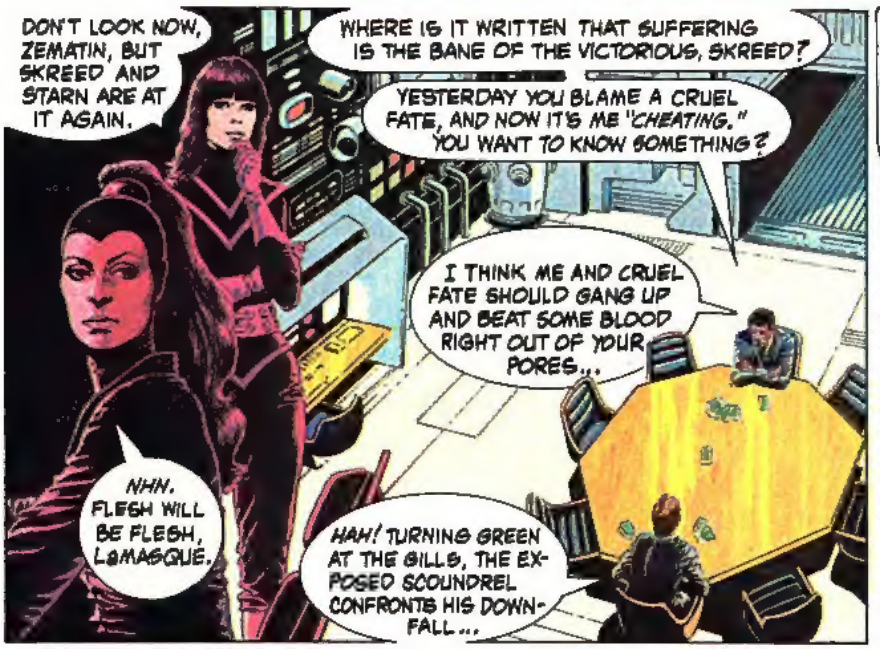

SOMEWHERE IN STRANGE LIGHT...
6
...A...
FROM
...MIND...
SIRIUS
phase 1 PHAEDRA
...CONCEIVES.
SIX.

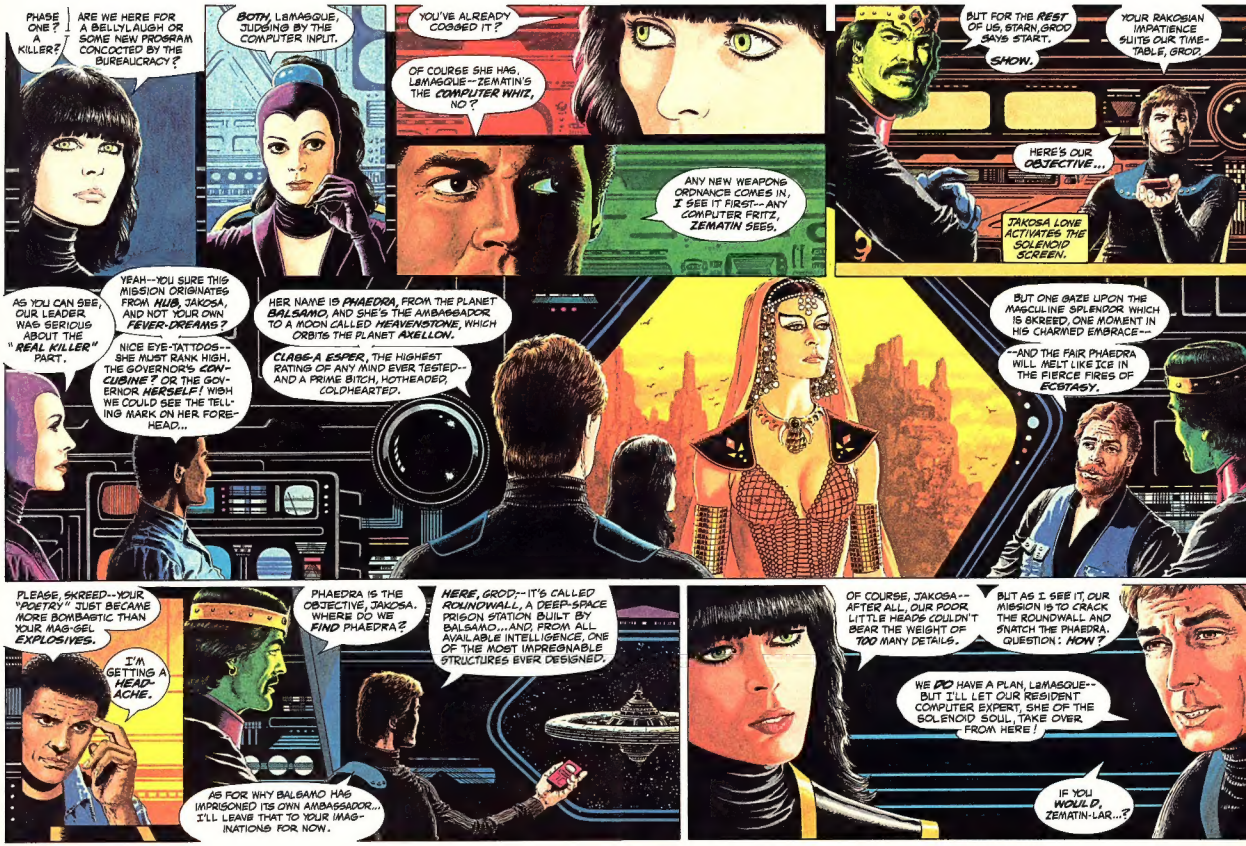

YOU LOSE AGAIN, WORD-SLINGER.
AND SMILING SMUGLY, YOU CHEAT AGAIN, STARN...
...PERHAPS FOR THE LAST TIME.


DON'T LOOK NOW, ZEMATIN, BUT SKREED AND STARN ARE AT IT AGAIN.
WHERE IS IT WRITTEN THAT SUFFERING IS THE BANE OF THE VICTORIOUS, SKREED?
YESTERDAY YOU BLAME A CRUEL FATE, AND NOW IT'S ME "CHEATING." YOU WANT TO KNOW SOMETHING?
I THINK ME AND CRUEL FATE SHOULD GANG UP AND BEAT SOME BLOOD RIGHT OUT OF YOUR PORES...
NHN. FLESH WILL BE FLESH, LAMASQUE.
HAH! TURNING GREEN AT THE GILLS, THE EXPOSED SCOUNDREL CONFRONTS HIS DOWNFALL...

...BUT NO AMOUNT OF BLUSTER OR BRAVADO WILL STEM THE INEVITABLE, FOR HE NOW FACES THE ICY NERVE OF SKREED--POET, ROMANTIC, EXPLOSIVES EXPERT, STUDENT OF ANCIENT NARRATIVES...
--AND, WHEN OCCASION DEMANDS, A VERY DANGEROUS MAN!

SKREED...NEVER THREATEN LIGHTNING IF YOU CAN'T SPEAK IN THUNDER. NOW SIT DOWN AND DEAL THE NEXT HAND.
NAY, VILLAIN! WITH COOL RESOLVE, HE--
HAVE IT YOUR WAY--BUT THAT PIECE HAD BETTER PACK A HARDER WALLOP THAN YOUR SO-CALLED NARRATION!
BLASPHEMOUS CUR! DEFYING CERTAIN AND UGLY DEATH, HE DARES CAST CRUEL ASPERSIONS ON THE MASTER POET'S VERBAL DASH!

DASH?
DASH MEANS FAST.
YOUR TONGUE TAKES FOR-EVER, SKREED.
NOW SEE HERE, YOU OVER-GROWN ABORIGINE, NO ONE ASKED YOU TO--
ENOUGH! ALL OF YOU!
JAKOSA?
AH, INDEED IT IS.
MAKING HIS GRAND ENTRANCE, THE FEARLESS LEADER TOSSES A WET BLANKET ON WHAT PASSETH FOR FUN.
ENOUGH MAY BE ENOUGH, JAKOSA, BUT THE LACK OF RESPECT ACCORDED BY THESE MOTLEY--
I'M NOT IN THE MOOD, SKREED.
GROD--ZEMATIN-LAR--LaMASQUE... LET'S START THE MEETING.
HOWEVER WE MAY FEEL ABOUT HUB, AND WHATEVER ITS MOTIVES IN THIS MISSION, THE FACT REMAINS THAT SOME 23 BILLION SOULS ON THREE WORLDS HANG IN THE BALANCE.
AH, WELL...
THUS DO THE SIX INTREPID AGENTS FROM SIRIUS SWARM GATHER IN THE HUSHED CHAMBER AS THEIR LEADER, THE REVERED JAKOSA LONE, GRIMLY ADDRESSES THE CONVOCATION...
SHUT UP, SKREED. GROD WANTS TO HEAR WHY WE'RE HERE!
SKREED MAY BE A WRETCHED POET, GROD, BUT GRIM IS CERTAINLY THE OPERATIVE WORD.
JUST RECEIVED: OUR ASSIGNMENT ORDERS FROM SIRIUS HUB.
PHASE ONE IS A KILLER ALL BY ITSELF, SO I WON'T EVEN TROUBLE YOU WITH THE REST UNTIL THE TIME COMES.


PHASE ONE? A KILLER?
ARE WE HERE FOR A BELLY-LAUGH OR SOME NEW PROGRAM CONCOCTED BY THE BUREAUCRACY?
BOTH, LaMASQUE, JUDGING BY THE COMPUTER INPUT.
YOU'VE ALREADY COSSED IT?
OF COURSE SHE HAS, LaMASQUE--ZEMATIN'S THE COMPUTER WHIZ, NO?
ANY NEW WEAPONS ORDNANCE COMES IN, I SEE IT FIRST--ANY COMPUTER FRITZ, ZEMATIN SEES.
BUT FOR THE REST OF US, STARN, GROD SAYS START.
SHOW.
YOUR RAKOSIAN IMPATIENCE SUITS OUR TIME-TABLE, GROD.
HERE'S OUR OBJECTIVE...
JAKOSA LONE ACTIVATES THE SOLENOID SCREEN.
9
AS YOU CAN SEE, OUR LEADER WAS SERIOUS ABOUT THE "REAL KILLER" PART.
YEAH--YOU SURE THIS MISSION ORIGINATES FROM HUB, JAKOSA, AND NOT YOUR OWN FEVER-DREAMS?
NICE EYE-TATTOOS--SHE MUST RANK HIGH. THE GOVERNOR'S CON-CUBINE? OR THE GOV-ERNOR HERSELF! WISH WE COULD SEE THE TELL-ING MARK ON HER FORE-HEAD...
HER NAME IS PHAEDRA, FROM THE PLANET BALSAMO, AND SHE'S THE AMBASSADOR TO A MOON CALLED HEAVENSTONE, WHICH ORBITS THE PLANET AXELLON.
CLASS-A ESPER, THE HIGHEST RATING OF ANY MIND EVER TESTED--AND A PRIME BITCH, HOTHEADED, COLDHEARTED.
BUT ONE GAZE UPON THE MASCULINE SPLENDOR WHICH IS SKREED, ONE MOMENT IN HIS CHARMED EMBRACE--
--AND THE FAIR PHAEDRA WILL MELT LIKE ICE IN THE FIERCE FIRES OF ECSTASY.
PLEASE, SKREED--YOUR "POETRY" JUST BECAME MORE BOMBASTIC THAN YOUR MAG-GEL EXPLOSIVES.
I'M GETTING A HEAD-ACHE.
PHAEDRA IS THE OBJECTIVE, JAKOSA. WHERE DO WE FIND PHAEDRA?
HERE, GROD;--IT'S CALLED ROUNDWALL, A DEEP-SPACE PRISON STATION BUILT BY BALSAMO...AND, FROM ALL AVAILABLE INTELLIGENCE, ONE OF THE MOST IMPREGNABLE STRUCTURES EVER DESIGNED.
AS FOR WHY BALSAMO HAS IMPRISONED ITS OWN AMBASSADOR... I'LL LEAVE THAT TO YOUR IMAG-INATIONS FOR NOW.
OF COURSE, JAKOSA--AFTER ALL, OUR POOR LITTLE HEADS COULDN'T BEAR THE WEIGHT OF TOO MANY DETAILS.
BUT AS I SEE IT, OUR MISSION IS TO CRACK THE ROUNDWALL AND SNATCH THE PHAEDRA. QUESTION: HOW?
WE DO HAVE A PLAN, LaMASQUE--BUT I'LL LET OUR RESIDENT COMPUTER EXPERT, SHE OF THE SOLENOID SOUL, TAKE OVER FROM HERE!
IF YOU WOULD, ZEMATIN-LAR...?

"AS YOU WISH, JAKOSA. FIRST, ROUND-WALL IS EQUIPPED WITH SOPHISTICATED SENSORS--ANYTHING MOVING WITHIN A THOUSAND RADS TRIGGERS AN ALARM AND RUNS THE RISK OF BEING VAPORIZED BY THE FAX-MEN GUARDS.

"NEXT, SHOULD THE SENSORS BE PENETRATED, THE HULL IS STRATEGICALLY BOOBYTRAPPED HERE, HERE, HERE, AND SO ON-- NO WAY OF BREACHING THE HULL WITHOUT TRIPPING AT LEAST ONE OF THEM.

"FINALLY, SHOULD THE BOOBYTRAPS BE CIRCUMVENTED, THERE ARE FAX-MEN ON CONSTANT PATROL, WITH RESERVE FORCES CONCENTRATED HERE, HERE, HERE, ET CETERA."

SO WHY DO THEY NEED SIX HOT-SHOTS LIKE *US*? THE MISSION'S A *SLEEPWALKER'S DREAM.*

SARCASM ACCEPTED, BUT THERE *IS* A VULNERABLE POINT--*HERE*. UNFORTUNATELY, PHAEDRA IS CONFINED ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE RING... SO EVEN IF WE EXPLOIT THE WEAKNESS, WE'D HAVE TO MAKE OUR WAY THROUGH FULLY *HALF* OF THE STATION.

WE'LL WALK ON WATER WHEN THE FLOOD HITS-- RIGHT NOW, AS THE GROUP'S WEAPON EXPERT, I'M MORE INTERESTED IN THAT *VULNERABLE POINT!*

IT'S THE STATION'S *POWER-CIRCUITRY*, STARN--IF WE CAN BURN THROUGH THE HULL TO ELIMINATE THE ALARM AND BOOBYTRAP CIRCUITS...

THERE'S THAT *LASER-TORCH* I TINKERED TOGETHER... OUGHT TO BURN THROUGH A *PLANET.*

WE'RE *COUNTING* ON IT, STARN.

AS FOR THE FAX-MEN, WE SWALLOW THE STANDARD CHANCES.

ONE SMALL ITEM, FEARLESS LEADER. BURNING THROUGH HULLS IS ALL VERY EXCITING, BUT IF THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE IS ACTIVATED BY *MOVEMENT...*

...HOW DO WE *REACH* THE HULL WITHOUT *MOVING?*

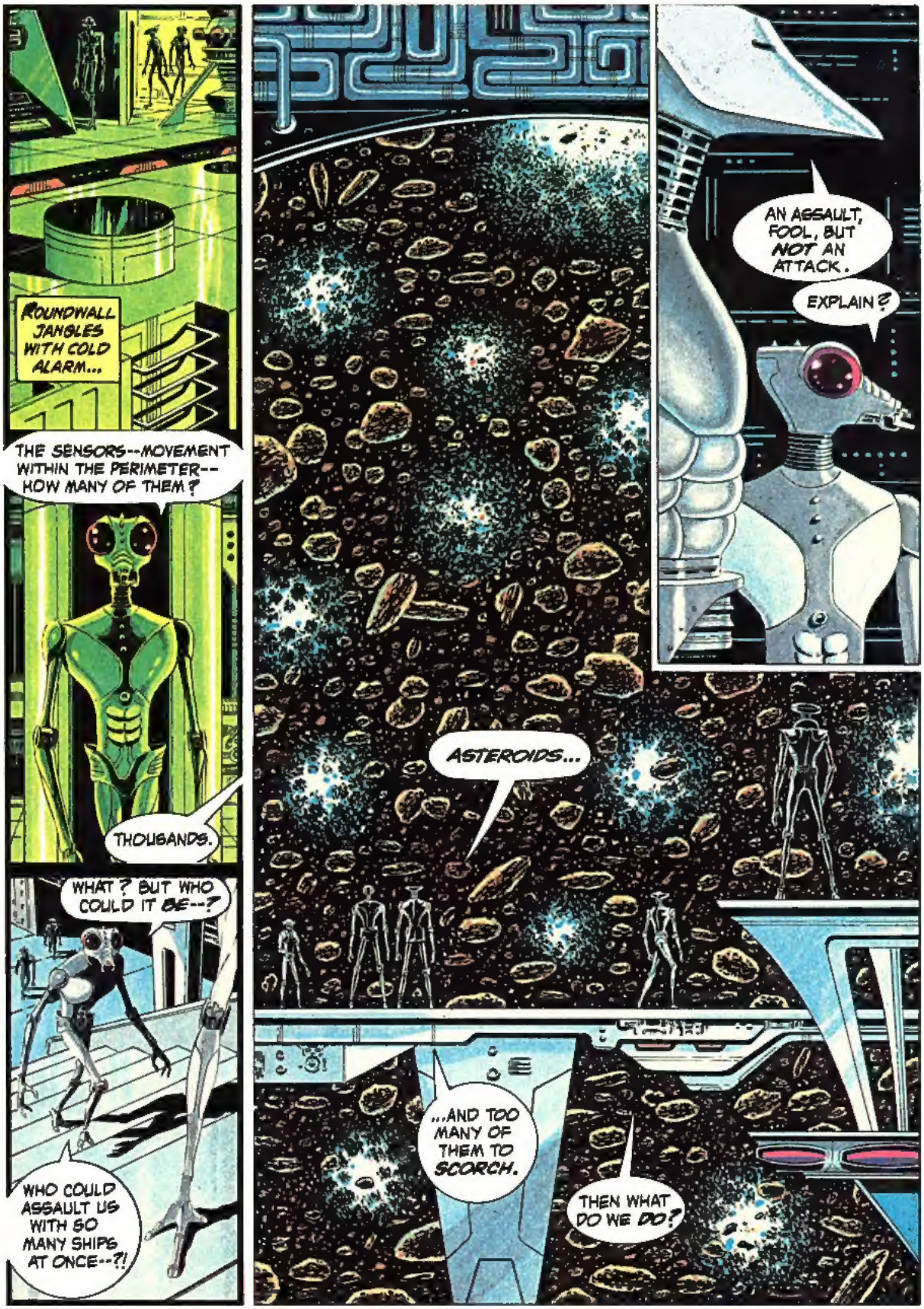
OR HAS STARN *ALSO* TINKERED TOGETHER A *TELEPORTATION DUCT?*

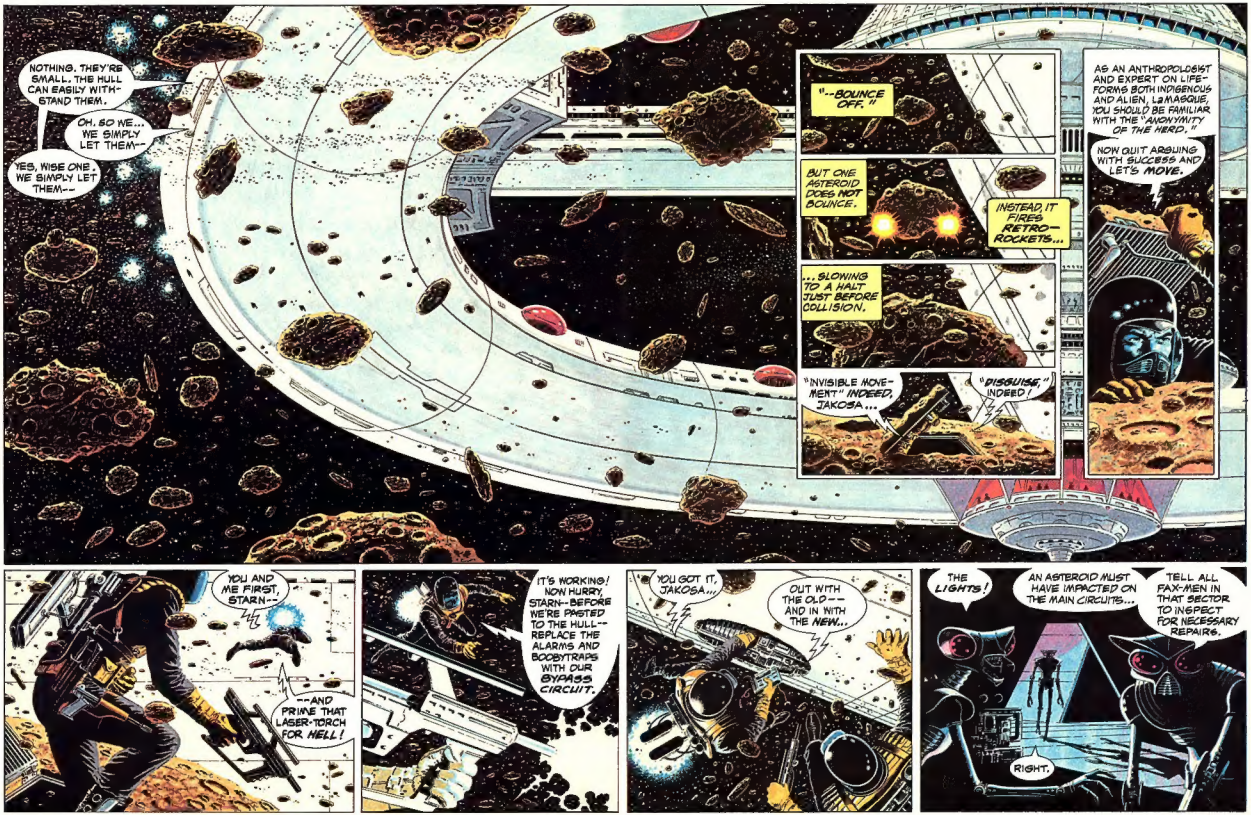
THE NEXT BEST THING, LaMASQUE-- *INVISIBLE* MOVEMENT.

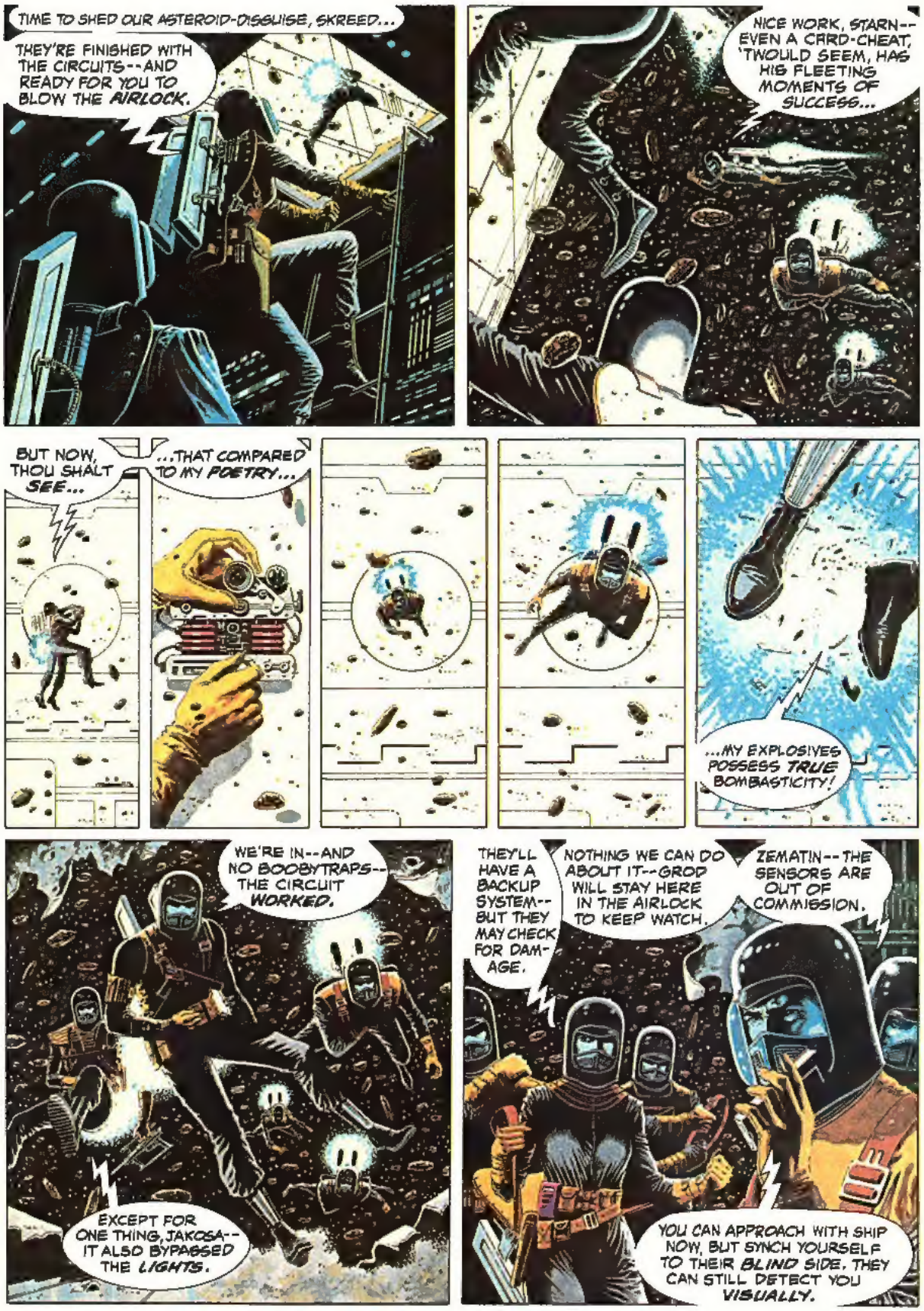
I *SUPPOSE* I HEARD THAT RIGHT...

YOUR EARS ARE FINE--WE'RE GOING IN *DISGUISE.*

ZEMATIN-LAR-- YOU'LL REMAIN HERE WITH SHIP'S COMPUTERS.


ROUNDWALL JANGLES WITH COLD ALARM...
THE SENSORS--MOVEMENT WITHIN THE PERIMETER--HOW MANY OF THEM?
THOUSANDS.
WHAT? BUT WHO COULD IT BE--?
WHO COULD ASSAULT US WITH SO MANY SHIPS AT ONCE--?!
ASTEROIDS...
...AND TOO MANY OF THEM TO SCORCH.
THEN WHAT DO WE DO?
AN ASSAULT, FOOL, BUT NOT AN ATTACK.
EXPLAIN?


NOTHING. THEY'RE SMALL. THE HULL CAN EASILY WITHSTAND THEM.
OH. SO WE... WE SIMPLY LET THEM--
YES, WISE ONE. WE SIMPLY LET THEM--
"--BOUNCE OFF."
BUT ONE ASTEROID DOES NOT BOUNCE.
INSTEAD, IT FIRES RETRO-ROCKETS...
...SLOWING TO A HALT JUST BEFORE COLLISION.
"INVISIBLE MOVEMENT" INDEED, JAKOSA...
"DISGUISE," INDEED!
AS AN ANTHROPOLOGIST AND EXPERT ON LIFE-FORMS BOTH INDIGENOUS AND ALIEN, LAMARQUE, YOU SHOULD BE FAMILIAR WITH THE "ANONYMITY OF THE HERD."
NOW QUIT ARGUING WITH SUCCESS AND LET'S MOVE.
YOU AND ME FIRST, STARN--
--AND PRIME THAT LASER-TORCH FOR HELL!
IT'S WORKING! NOW HURRY, STARN--BEFORE WE'RE PASTED TO THE HULL--REPLACE THE ALARMS AND BOOBYTRAPS WITH OUR BYPASS CIRCUIT.
YOU GOT IT, JAKOSA...
OUT WITH THE OLD--AND IN WITH THE NEW...
THE LIGHTS!
AN ASTEROID MUST HAVE IMPACTED ON THE MAIN CIRCUITS...
TELL ALL FAX-MEN IN THAT SECTOR TO INSPECT FOR NECESSARY REPAIRS.
RIGHT.

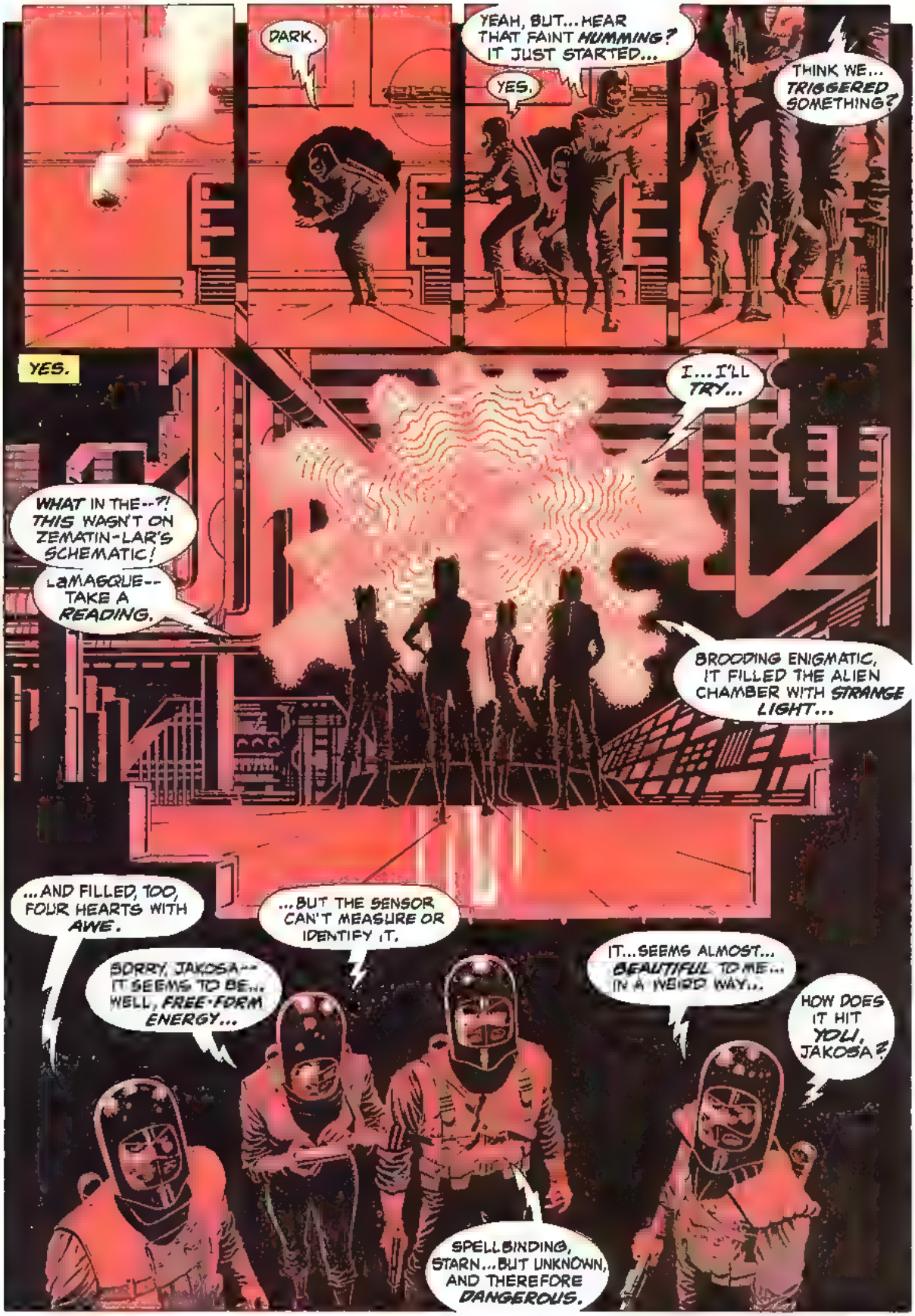

TIME TO SHED OUR ASTEROID-DISGUISE, SKREED...
THEY'RE FINISHED WITH THE CIRCUITS--AND READY FOR YOU TO BLOW THE AIRLOCK.
NICE WORK, STARN--EVEN A CRRD-CHEAT, 'TWOULD SEEM, HAS HIS FLEETING MOMENTS OF SUCCESS...
BUT NOW, THOU SHALT SEE...
...THAT COMPARED TO MY POETRY...
...MY EXPLOSIVES POSSESS TRUE BOMBASTICITY!
WE'RE IN--AND NO BOOBYTRAPS--THE CIRCUIT WORKED.
EXCEPT FOR ONE THING, JAKOSA--IT ALSO BYPASSED THE LIGHTS.
THEY'LL HAVE A BACKUP SYSTEM--BUT THEY MAY CHECK FOR DAMAGE.
NOTHING WE CAN DO ABOUT IT--GROD WILL STAY HERE IN THE AIRLOCK TO KEEP WATCH.
ZEMATIN--THE SENSORS ARE OUT OF COMMISSION.
YOU CAN APPROACH WITH SHIP NOW, BUT SYNCH YOURSELF TO THEIR BLIND SIDE. THEY CAN STILL DETECT YOU VISUALLY.

I READ YOU, JAKOSA--APPROACHING NOW.
BUT THE REST OF THE MISSION? IT GOES WELL?
NEAR ENOUGH, ZEMATIN. TAKE POSITION FOR PICK-UP--GROD WILL BE WATCHING FOR YOU!
AND, AS THE FOUR OTHERS MOVE INTO THE CURVED CORRIDORS OF ROUND-WALL...
JAKOSA--MY OWN SENSOR DETECTS MOVEMENT--FOUR OF THEM.
SIGNAL INCREASING--THEY'RE COMING THIG WAY.
ALL RIGHT--WE'LL USE THE LINE.
YOU'RE PACKING MORE WEAPONS THAN AN ARSENAL, STARN, SO YOU'RE ELECTED BAIT!
THE REST OF YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.
LET'S MAKE IT SWIFT, SWEET, AND SLICK, SHALL WE?
YOUR PLAY, STARN.
HEY--OVER HERE!
SO YOU'RE FAX-MEN, HUH? FACSIMILES OF WHAT? TIN CANS?
EASY, FRIENDS--JUST KIDDING!
IN FACT, WHAT I'M ACTUALLY DOING IS SURRENDERING!
I KNOW IT'S DARK IN HERE, BUT SURELY YOU CAN SEE--
NOW!

JAKOSA ASKED FOR SWEETNESS, DIDN'T HE?
HACKNEYED LINE LIKE THAT, STARN-- I DIDN'T THINK THEY'D GO FOR IT.
LIKE BEES TO HONEY...
QUIET! THE DOOR BEHIND US-- STARTING TO OPEN!
SET YOUR-SELVES...
--IDIOTS BACK IN CONTROL. THE LIGHTS ARE ON AGAIN, AREN'T THEY?
SO HOW MUCH DAMAGE COULD THE ASTEROIDS HAVE DONE?
WASTE OF TIME IF YOU ASK M--
BOO.

ANY MORE OF THEM?
ALL CLEAR HERE.
AND HERE.
ALL RIGHT, THEN... LOOKS LIKE SMOOTH SAILING FROM--
UH, YOU WERE SAYING, FEARLESS LEADER?
ALERT! SECURITY BREACH! INTRUDERS ABOARD! REPEAT--
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO TURNED IT INTO A BEEHIVE, STARN...
DON'T BLAME ME FOR THE SWARM!

FROM THE RIGHT--!
AND MORE CONVERGING!
CORRIDOR'S CHOKED OFF-- WE'RE BOTTLED!
OPEN THAT INNER WALL, STARN-- FAST!
WHEN IN DOUBT, TAP THE TINKERER, ah?
ALL RIGHT, BURROW'S DUG...
DIVE IN!
Y'KNOW, JAKOSA, I'M GETTING MAD ENOUGH TO WISH THOSE THINGS COULD BLEED... AND FEEL IT.
THIS IS JUST A DUCT, STARN--YOU'LL HAVE TO BURN THROUGH THE NEXT HULL AS WELL!
IT'LL PUT US INTO THE RING'S INNER CHAMBERS--SLOWER GOING THAN THE OUTER CORRIDORS, BUT THEY'LL HAVE A HARDER TIME FIXING ON US...


DARK.
YEAH, BUT... HEAR THAT FAINT HUMMING? IT JUST STARTED...
YES.
THINK WE... TRIGGERED SOMETHING?
YES.
I... I'LL TRY...
WHAT IN THE--?! THIS WASN'T ON ZEMATIN-LAR'S SCHEMATIC!
LaMASQUE-- TAKE A READING.
BRODDING ENIGMATIC, IT FILLED THE ALIEN CHAMBER WITH STRANGE LIGHT...
...AND FILLED, TOO, FOUR HEARTS WITH AWE.
...BUT THE SENSOR CAN'T MEASURE OR IDENTIFY IT.
SORRY, JAKOSA-- IT SEEMS TO BE... WELL, FREE-FORM ENERGY...
IT... SEEMS ALMOST... BEAUTIFUL TO ME... IN A WEIRD WAY...
HOW DOES IT HIT YOU, JAKOSA?
SPELLBINDING, STARN... BUT UNKNOWN, AND THEREFORE DANGEROUS.

BUT NO MORE TIME TO *GAPE* AT THE THING WITH OUR *OBJECTIVE* WAITING...

GOT TO SPRING PHAEDRA WHILE WE STILL *CAN.*

SEVENTEEN FAX-MEN DESTROYED--INVADERS NOW PROCEEDING THROUGH INNER CHAMBERS.

AND YOU'RE *STANDING* HERE, FOOL!

DON'T YOU REALIZE WHAT THEY'RE *DOING*?! THEY'LL REACH THE *CELLS* SOON!

HEY! SOMEONE FREE ON ROUNDWALL OTHER THAN *FAX-MEN*?!

I DON'T SEE *PHAEDRA*, JAKOSA--DO YOU?

AS A MATTER OF FACT, I DO...

LET US *OUT!*

RIGHT HERE, IN HER OWN PRIVATE--AND *LUXURIOUS*--CELL.

SHE SEEMS TO BE IN A TRANCE, STARN--WHIP OUT YOUR TORCH AND MELT HER OUT.

NO TIME FOR *THAT*, JAKOSA--BUT I *WILL* BURN HER *FREE*...

STAY BACK, LADY, UNLESS YOU WANT YOUR BAHOOKIE FRIED.

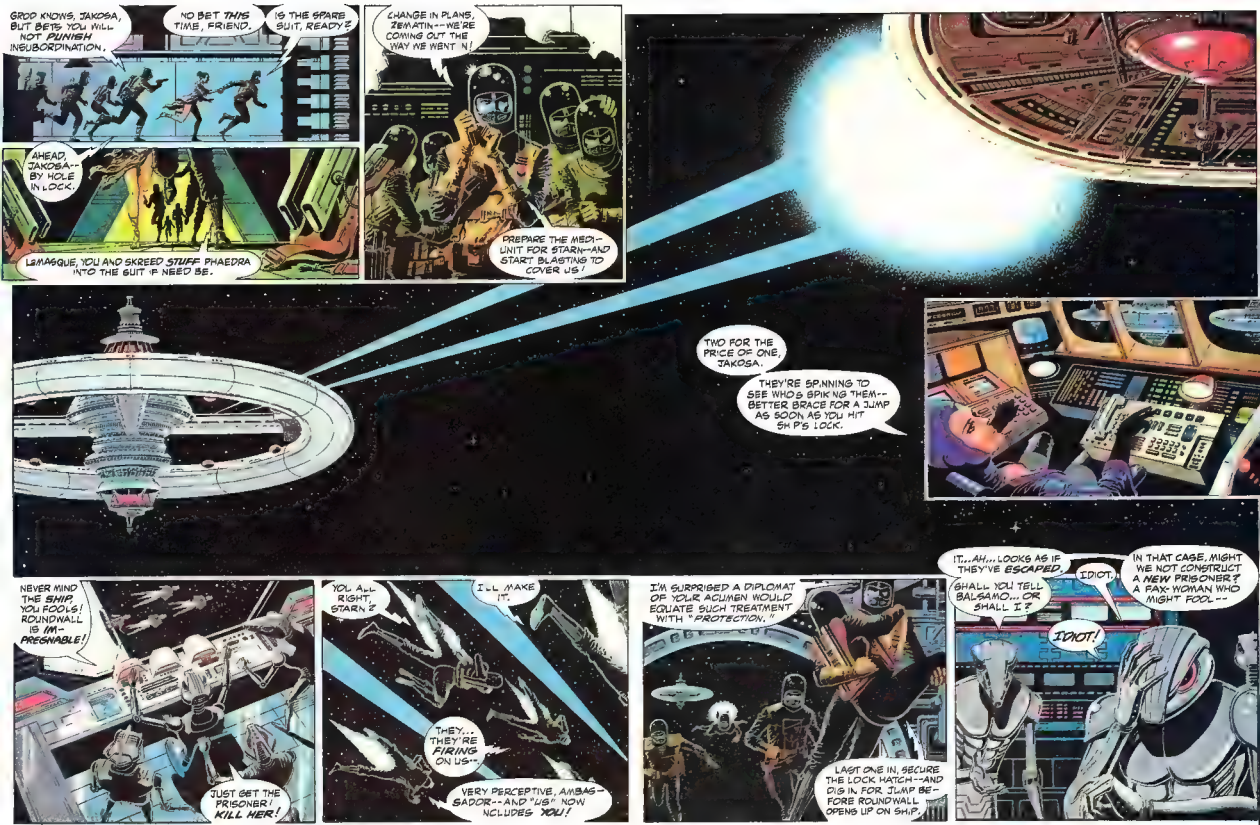
WE MADE IT, GROD. BREAK OUT THE SPARE SUIT AND HELMET FOR OUR GUEST--AND MEET US MID-WAY ON THE RING.

IF WE'RE NOT THERE IN FIFTEEN MINUTES, YOU KNOW WHAT TO *DO.*

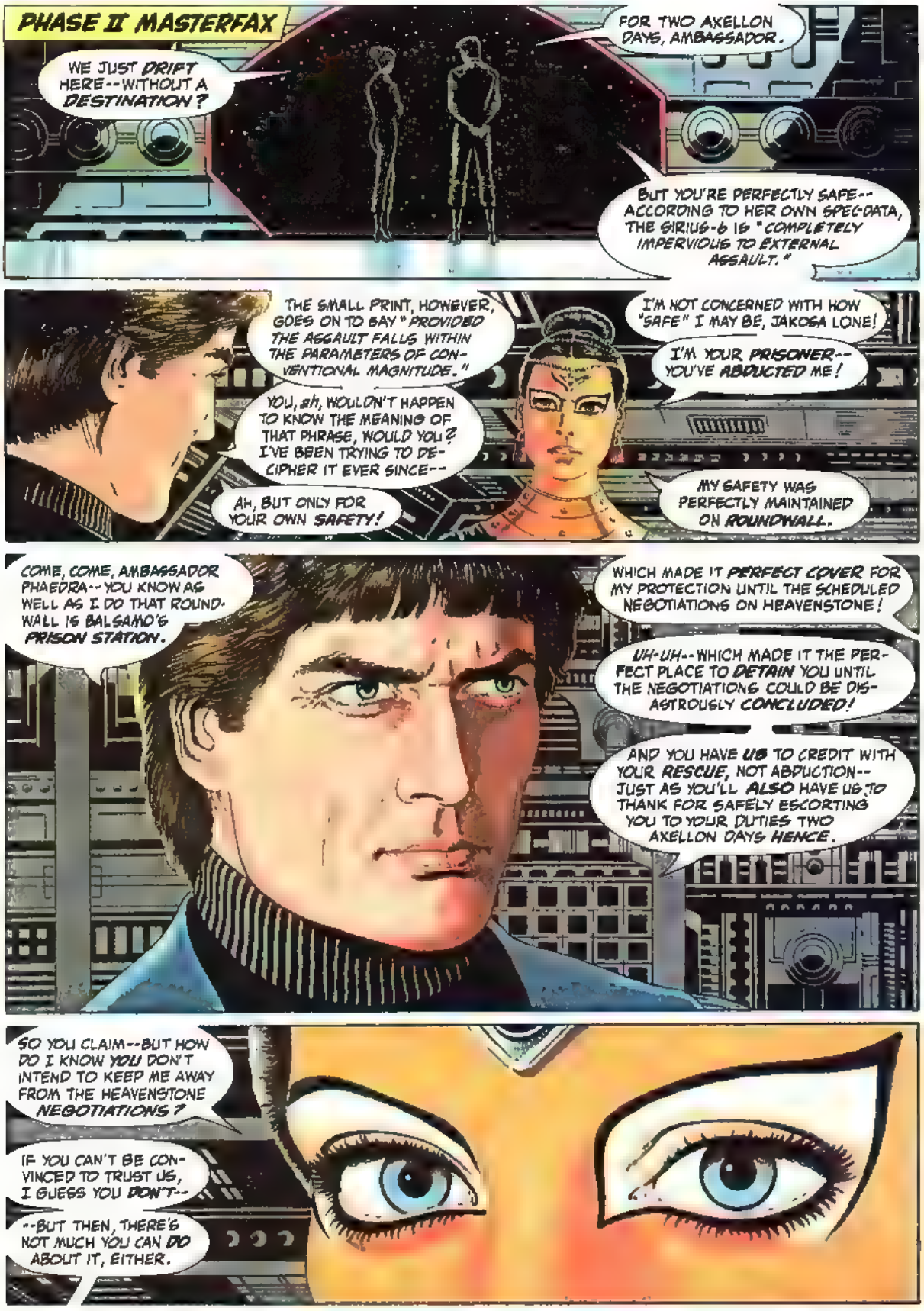
CHECK, JAKOSA--GROD KNOWS.
ZEMATIN WAITS ON BLIND SIDE WITH SHIP.
COME SOON. OUT.
RISE AND SHINE, PHAEDRA. THE NAME'S JAKOSA LONE, LEADER OF THE SIRIUS SIX--MISSION: RESCUE.
THE MEN OF MY DREAMS. WHICH MEANS I WAS NOT DREAMING...NOR EVEN HALLUCINATING.
IT SEEMS, SIR, THAT YOU AND I HAVE... BRIDGED MINDS.
EH? WHAT ARE YOU--
BUT WHATEVER MENTAL AFFINITY WE MAY SHARE, JAKOSA LONE, IT IS FAR OUTWEIGHED BY OUR RESPECTIVE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION.
I HAVE NEITHER A DESIRE NOR A NEED FOR "RESCUE."
THEN YOU'RE BEING DETAINED HERE FOR YOUR HEALTH, AMBASSADOR?
PRECISELY--FOR MY PROTECTION--NO DOUBT FROM BRIGANDS SUCH AS YOU.
WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT THE BALSAMO GOVERNMENT WANTS YOU TO BELIEVE! BUT I TELL YOU--
BAD NEWS, JAKOSA--SENSOR PICKS UP MORE FAX-MEN...
HORDES.
I SUGGEST YOU HEED HER WARNING AND LEAVE, JAKOSA LONE--WHILE YOU STILL MAY.
NOT WITHOUT YOU, AMBASSADOR.

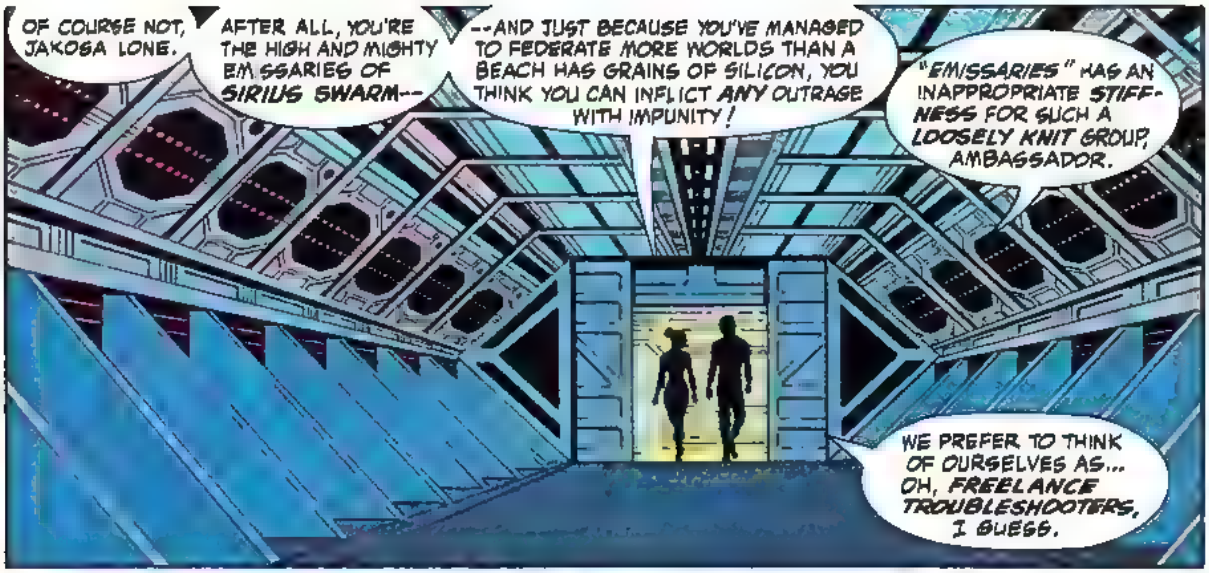
IN THE CORRIDOR...
I'M HIT--!
IT'S STARN! GET HIM INTO THE CELL!
FAX-MEN--TRAPPING THEM IN PHAEDRA'S CELL!
TOO MANY. GROD MUST STAY BACK--CONCEIVE PLAN...
STARN'S HURT--LABER-TORCH TRASHED! NO WAY OUT EXCEPT THE WAY WE CAME IN!
AND THE POET SKREED, CORNERED IN A BALSAMON PRISON CELL, GRIMLY KNEW HE SHOULD NEVER HAVE BECOME EMBROILED IN SUCH A HAREBRAINED--
BITE IT, SKREED! WE KNEW THIS WOULD BE NO STAR-HIKE LONG BEFORE WE MADE THE JUMP FROM SIRIUS SWARM!
BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE'RE SUICIDERS, LADY! I'VE ALMOST LOST ONE MAN, BUT I'M LEAVING WITH THE REST OF MY TEAM INTACT!
THAT NOW INCLUDES YOU, WHETHER YOU WANT TO COME OR NOT!
FAX-MEN CLOSING ON THEM--GROD MUST FIND WAY TO TURN TABLES...
WAIT! MANY BARS... MANY CELLS... MANY PRISONERS...
...AND IF TERMINAL HOUSES CONTROLS GROD THINKS IT DOES...
YES! GROD'S PLAN WAS NOT IN HIS HEAD--BUT IN WALL NEXT TO HEAD!

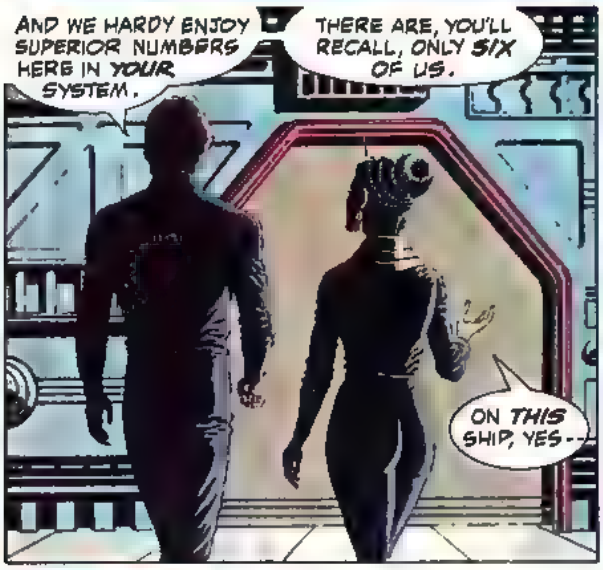
FEEDING TIME AT THE ZOO...
MAIN COURSE: THE FORMER KEEPERS.
NO MORE TIME TO ARGUE, AMBASSADOR!
LET GO OF ME! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?! RELEASED THE PRISONERS!
INCLUDING YOU, PHAEDRA--THE MOST IMPORTANT PRISONER IN THE WHOLE SCURVY LOT!
GROD! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU! IF WE DIDN'T MEET IN FIFTEEN MINUTES, YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO JET LIKE HELL FOR SHIP!


GROD KNOWS, JAKOSA, BUT BETS YOU WILL NOT PUNISH INSUBORDINATION.
NO BET THIS TIME, FRIEND.
IS THE SPARE SUIT, READY?
AHEAD, JAKOSA--BY HOLE IN LOCK.
L'MAGQUE, YOU AND SKREED STUFF PHAEDRA INTO THE SUIT IF NEED BE.
CHANGE IN PLANS, ZEMATIN--WE'RE COMING OUT THE WAY WE WENT IN!
PREPARE THE MEDI-UNIT FOR STARN--AND START BLASTING TO COVER US!
TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE, JAKOSA.
THEY'RE SPINNING TO SEE WHO'S SPIKING THEM--BETTER BRACE FOR A JUMP AS SOON AS YOU HIT SHIP'S LOCK.
NEVER MIND THE SHIP, YOU FOOLS! ROUNDWALL IS IM-PREGNABLE!
JUST GET THE PRISONER! KILL HER!
YOU ALL RIGHT, STARN?
I'LL MAKE IT.
THEY... THEY'RE FIRING ON US--!
VERY PERCEPTIVE, AMBASSADOR--AND "US" NOW INCLUDES YOU!
I'M SURPRISED A DIPLOMAT OF YOUR ACUMEN WOULD EQUATE SUCH TREATMENT WITH "PROTECTION."
LAST ONE IN, SECURE THE LOCK HATCH--AND DIG IN FOR JUMP BEFORE ROUNDWALL OPENS UP ON SHIP.
IT...AH,...LOOKS AS IF THEY'VE ESCAPED.
IDIOT.
SHALL YOU TELL BALSAMO...OR SHALL I?
IN THAT CASE, MIGHT WE NOT CONSTRUCT A NEW PRISONER? A PAX WOMAN WHO MIGHT FOOL--
IDIOT!

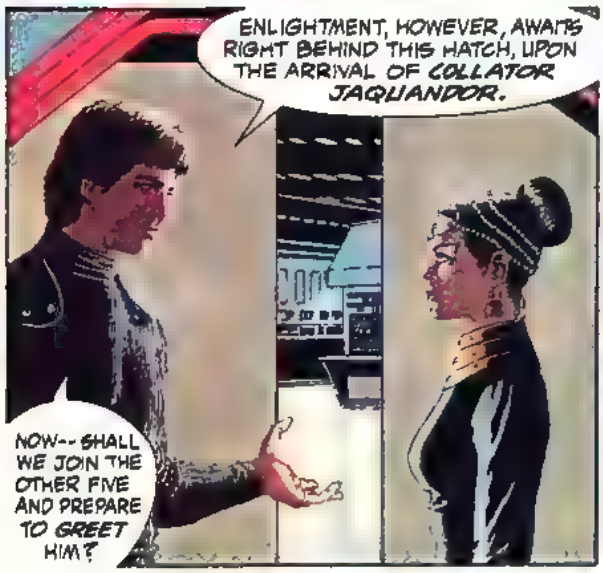
LATER, AS THE SIRIUS-6 COMES OUT OF ITS SHORT JUMP...
SIRIUS SWARM?! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN! YOU POMPOUS AGGEG THINK YOU RULE ALL OF KNOWN SPACE!
DON'T FLATTER YOURSELF, AMBASSADOR. YOUR JERKWATER LITTLE PLANET WOULDN'T BE ACCEPTED BY SIRIUS IF IT GOT DOWN ON ITS KNEES AND BLED CIDRION CRYSTAL.
BUT IF YOU THINK YOU CAN BLACK-MAIL BALSAMO INTO JOINING YOUR VILE FEDERATION BY HOLDING ME HOSTAGE--
TELL HER, ZEMATIN.
YOU'RE BALSAMO'S AMBASSADOR TO HEAVENSTONE--AXELLON'S MOON--CORRECT?
WHAT OF IT?
THEN YOU'RE WELL AWARE OF THE IMMENSE EFFORT EXPENDED IN SCULPTING THAT ONCE-DEAD MOON INTO ONE OF THE MOST GLORIOUS WORLDS IN EXISTENCE.
I SHOULD BE--MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER WAS THE SUPREME ARCHITECT OF HEAVENSTONE.
AND YOUR RESCUE, AMBASSADOR, WAS PHASE ONE OF OUR ATTEMPT TO PREVENT HEAVENSTONE FROM BEING BLASTED RIGHT BACK TO A DEAD CINDER...
...QUITE POSSIBLY BY BALSAMO ITSELF.
YOU...YOU'RE LYING! YOU'RE NOTHING BUT FILTHY HEATHEN LIARS!
DIPLOMACY IS ALIVE AND WELL--AND SOMETHING TELLS ME, AMBASSADOR PHAEDRA...
...THAT YOU AND I ARE GOING TO MAKE SUPERB ALLIES.
END PART 1

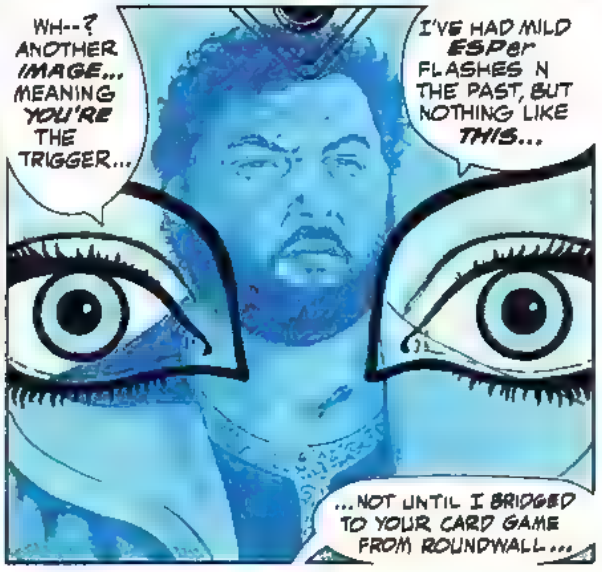

PHASE II MASTERFAX
WE JUST DRIFT HERE--WITHOUT A DESTINATION?
FOR TWO AXELLON DAYS, AMBASSADOR.
BUT YOU'RE PERFECTLY SAFE--ACCORDING TO HER OWN SPEC-DATA, THE SIRIUS-6 IS "COMPLETELY IMPERVIOUS TO EXTERNAL ASSAULT."
THE SMALL PRINT, HOWEVER, GOES ON TO SAY "PROVIDED THE ASSAULT FALLS WITHIN THE PARAMETERS OF CONVENTIONAL MAGNITUDE."
YOU, ah, WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO KNOW THE MEANING OF THAT PHRASE, WOULD YOU? I'VE BEEN TRYING TO DECIPHER IT EVER SINCE--
AH, BUT ONLY FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY!
I'M NOT CONCERNED WITH HOW "SAFE" I MAY BE, JAKOSA LONE!
I'M YOUR PRISONER--YOU'VE ABDUCTED ME!
MY SAFETY WAS PERFECTLY MAINTAINED ON ROUNDWALL.
COME, COME, AMBASSADOR PHAEDRA--YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO THAT ROUNDWALL IS BALSAMO'S PRISON STATION.
WHICH MADE IT PERFECT COVER FOR MY PROTECTION UNTIL THE SCHEDULED NEGOTIATIONS ON HEAVENSTONE!
UH-UH--WHICH MADE IT THE PERFECT PLACE TO DETAIN YOU UNTIL THE NEGOTIATIONS COULD BE DISASTROUSLY CONCLUDED!
AND YOU HAVE US TO CREDIT WITH YOUR RESCUE, NOT ABDUCTION--JUST AS YOU'LL ALSO HAVE US TO THANK FOR SAFELY ESCORTING YOU TO YOUR DUTIES TWO AXELLON DAYS HENCE.
SO YOU CLAIM--BUT HOW DO I KNOW YOU DON'T INTEND TO KEEP ME AWAY FROM THE HEAVENSTONE NEGOTIATIONS?
IF YOU CAN'T BE CONVINCED TO TRUST US, I GUESS YOU DON'T--
--BUT THEN, THERE'S NOT MUCH YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT, EITHER.


OF COURSE NOT, JAKOSA LONE.
AFTER ALL, YOU'RE THE HIGH AND MIGHTY EMISSARIES OF SIRIUS SWARM--
--AND JUST BECAUSE YOU'VE MANAGED TO FEDERATE MORE WORLDS THAN A BEACH HAS GRAINS OF SILICON, YOU THINK YOU CAN INFLICT ANY OUTRAGE WITH IMPUNITY!
"EMISSARIES" HAS AN INAPPROPRIATE STIFFNESS FOR SUCH A LOOSELY KNIT GROUP, AMBASSADOR.
WE PREFER TO THINK OF OURSELVES AS... OH, FREELANCE TROUBLESHOOTERS, I GUESS.


AND WE HARDY ENJOY SUPERIOR NUMBERS HERE IN YOUR SYSTEM.
THERE ARE, YOU'LL RECALL, ONLY SIX OF US.
ON THIS SHIP, YES--

--BUT HOW MANY MORE SHIPS HAVE BEEN DISPATCHED BY SIRIUS?
AND WHAT DOES SIRIUS WANT IN OUR SYSTEM ANYWAY?
FIRST, WE'RE ALONE-- BELIEVE ME, BECAUSE WE DON'T WORK ANY OTHER WAY.
WHY ARE YOU HERE--?
AS FOR WHAT SIRIUS HUB HOPES TO ACCOMPLISH WITH OUR MISSION--
--WE DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS OURSELVES.


ENLIGHTMENT, HOWEVER, AWAITS RIGHT BEHIND THIS HATCH, UPON THE ARRIVAL OF COLLATOR JAQUANDOR.
NOW-- SHALL WE JOIN THE OTHER FIVE AND PREPARE TO GREET HIM?


WH--? ANOTHER IMAGE... MEANING YOU'RE THE TRIGGER...
I'VE HAD MILD ESPer FLASHES N THE PAST, BUT NOTHING LIKE THIS...
...NOT UNTIL I BRIDGED TO YOUR CARD GAME FROM ROUNDWALL...

SO YOUR MIND MUST CATALYZE MY VISIONS... AND THIS ONE IS... TERRIBLE...
UH, PERHAPS YOU SHOULD CHALK IT UP TO SHOCK FROM YOUR RECENT EXPERIENCE, AMBASSADOR.
GROUP...?
GLAD TO MEET YOU, AMBASSADOR.
APPARENTLY YOU'VE SUCCEEDED IN CHARMING OUR VIRILE LEADER...
SINCE OUR FIRST MEETING WITH OUR AMBASSADOR HERE WAS NECESSARILY RUSHED, INTRODUCTIONS ARE IN ORDER.
WE'VE ALL SEEN YOUR DATA-PROFILE, AMBASSADOR PHAEDRA, SO THIS IS LaMASQUE.
I WOULDN'T GO MUCH AS CLOSE MY EYES IN HIS PRESENCE.
AND YOU, LaMASQUE, CAN GO TO HELL.
M-hm.
SO MUCH FOR MY VIRTUOSITY IN DEFUSING DROPPED BOMBS.
SHE'S THE PSYCHOLOGIST-ANTHROPOLOGIST-DIPLOMAT OF THE GROUP--EXPERT ON ALIEN RELATIONS AND ADROIT IN DEFUSING EXPLOSIVE SITUATIONS.
UM, MOVING RIGHT ALONG, THIS IS GROD--STRONG AND DOESN'T SAY MUCH, BUT A GREASEMONKEY WIZARD.
AND UNDERNEATH IT ALL-- A MELANCHOLY STREAK AS BROAD AS HIS SHOULDERS.
INDEED, HE'S STRAIGHT FROM CENTRAL CASTING.
YOU'RE RAKOSIAN?
BORN ON RAKOS, YES.
AND YOU SLAVE FOR THE SIRIANS?
GROD WORKS FOR HIMSELF-- THE SIRIANS PAY GROD.
BESIDES... REMAINING ON RAKOS, NEVER WOULD GROD HAVE MET YOU, AMBASSADOR.

BEFORE YOU WONDER WHAT HE *MEANT* BY THAT, OVER AT THE COMPUTER WE HAVE *ZEMATIN-LAR*, OUR CYBERNETICS EXPERT.

BLESSED WITH A "*SOLENOID SOUL*," HER AFFINITY WITH MACHINES ALMOST RANKS AS A *SIXTH SENSE*.

COUNTDOWN MINUS NINETY TO THE COLLATOR'S ARRIVAL, JAKOSA.

WE'RE READY FOR HIM, ZEMATIN.

THE FUZZY ONE IS *SKREED*--EXPLOSIVES ENTREPRENEUR AND BOMBASTIC POET-IN-RESIDENCE.

TIPPING HIS NONEXISTENT HAT, HE GREETED THE LOVELY AMBASSADOR FROM BALSAMO WITH ELEGANT APLOMB.

AND SHE, IN TURN, RECIPROCATED WITH A *FROSTY GLARE*.

AN *OUCH* UPON MY *EGO*.

SEE ? I *KNEW* THIS'D BE FUN.

YOU CAN *ALL GO* TO HELL!

JOINED BY *STARN*, NO DOUBT--HE WHO IS OUR WEAPONS MAVEN, AND PHILOSOPHICAL TO A FATALISTIC FAULT.

CAN I HELP IT, IF ONE WAY OR ANOTHER AND SOONER OR LATER, *EVERYONE DIES*?

I WISH YOU'D *TRY*!

THERE--QUITE *PAINLESS*, WAS IT NOT ?

AND YOU'VE ALREADY MADE *MY* ACQUAINTANCE, BUT JUST TO FINISH WITH A FLOURISH--I'M *JAKOSA LONE*, THE BOSS.

NOT TO MENTION A SELF-RIGHTEOUS, SMUG *SON-OF-A-BITCH*!

WELL, MOTHER WOULD HARDLY *APPROVE*, BUT I *TOLD* YOU WE'D MET...

MATTER-CONVEYOR REGISTERS *INCOMING* PULSE...

MATTER-CONVEYOR--?!

BUT SUCH A THING EXISTS ONLY IN *FANTASY!*

WELCOME TO THE *LAND OF NOD*, AMBASSA-DOR!

JOIN SIRIUS SWARM AND WE'LL *SELL* YOU ONE--FULLY GUARANTEED.

YES--YOU'RE LOOKING AT *PROOF* OF ITS *PERFORM-ANCE.*

HIM?!

BUT HE'S THE...*VISION* I SAW IN THE CORRIDOR--WHEN I FELT SUCH DARKNESS... *DOOM*...

CAN'T SAY I CARE FOR THE CHARACTER-IZATION--

--BUT SINCE YOUR PROFILE INDICATES *ESPer* SEN-SITIVITY, I'LL KEEP THE PROTEST TO A *SOFT ROAR.*

FOR MY *FINAL* INTRODUCTION, AMBASSADOR PHAEDRA--

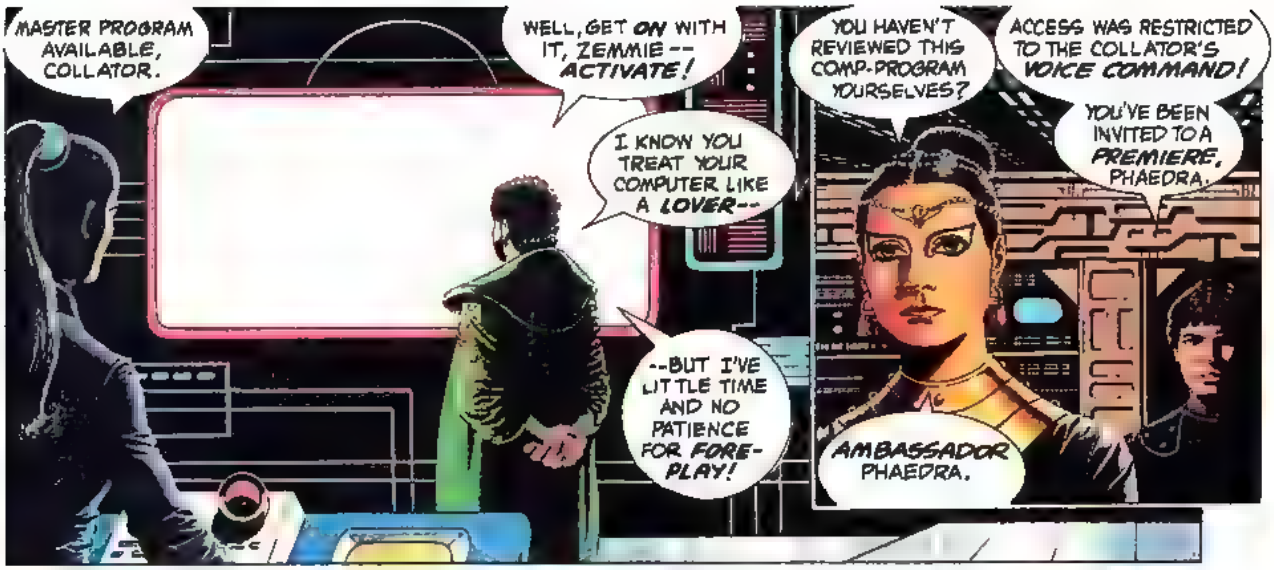
--I'D LIKE TO PRESENT *COLLATOR JAQUANDOR* OF SIRIUS SWARM, DROPPING IN TO *EXPLAIN* EVERYTHING.

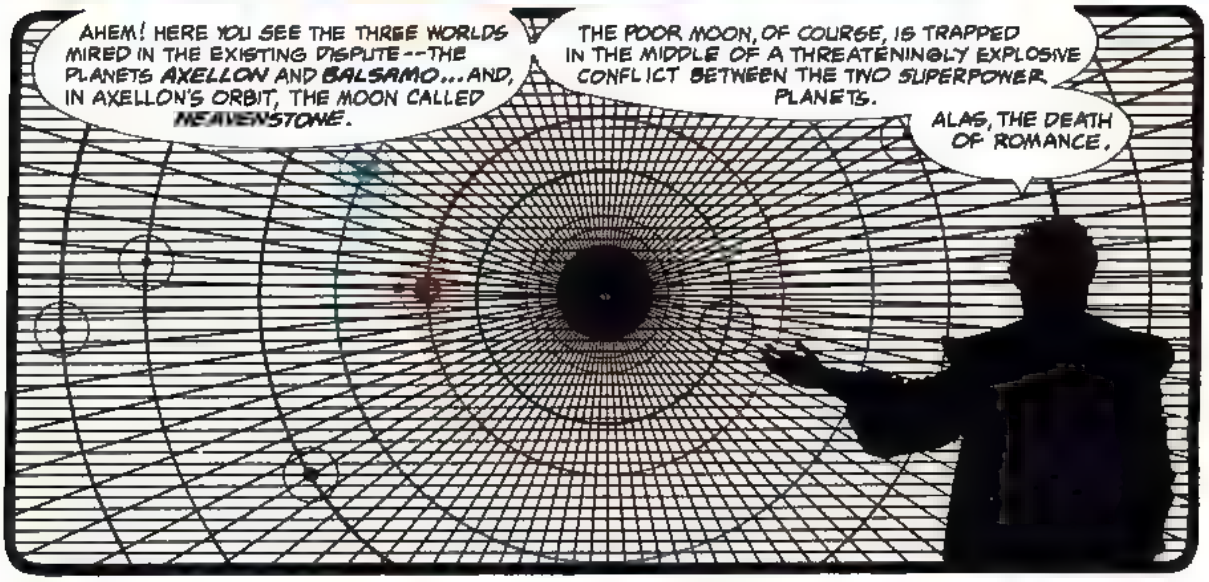
I DON'T RECALL BEING PROMOTED TO *GODHOOD*, AMBASSADOR, BUT I'LL EXPLAIN AS MUCH AS I *CAN*--

VIRGIN SWITCH ACCESSIBLE.

--IF ZEMATIN-LAR WOULD BE GOOD ENOUGH TO BREAK THE *SEAL*...?

PSHH!

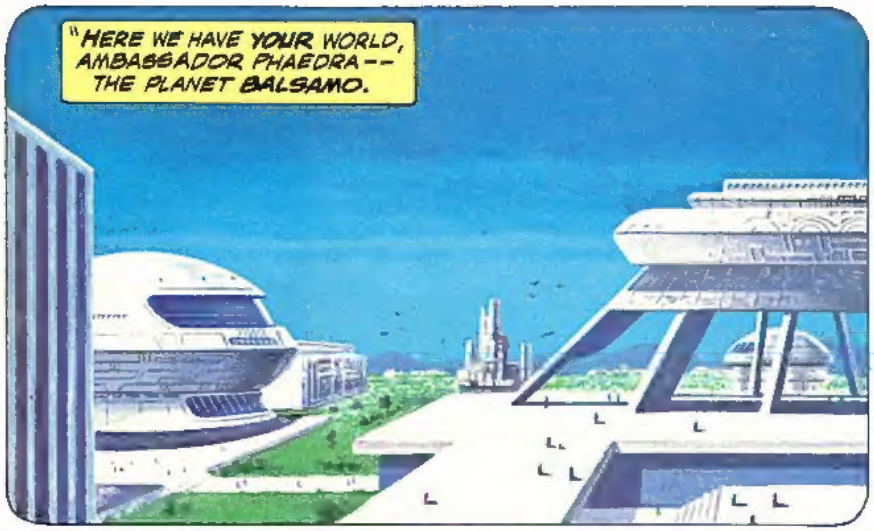

MASTER PROGRAM AVAILABLE, COLLATOR.
WELL, GET ON WITH IT, ZEMMIE -- ACTIVATE!
I KNOW YOU TREAT YOUR COMPUTER LIKE A LOVER--
--BUT I'VE LITTLE TIME AND NO PATIENCE FOR FORE-PLAY!
YOU HAVEN'T REVIEWED THIS COMP-PROGRAM YOURSELVES?
ACCESS WAS RESTRICTED TO THE COLLATOR'S VOICE COMMAND!
YOU'VE BEEN INVITED TO A PREMIERE, PHAEDRA.
AMBASSADOR PHAEDRA.


AHEM! HERE YOU SEE THE THREE WORLDS MIRED IN THE EXISTING DISPUTE--THE PLANETS AXELLON AND BALSAMO... AND, IN AXELLON'S ORBIT, THE MOON CALLED HEAVENSTONE.
THE POOR MOON, OF COURSE, IS TRAPPED IN THE MIDDLE OF A THREATENINGLY EXPLOSIVE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TWO SUPERPOWER PLANETS.
ALAS, THE DEATH OF ROMANCE.

"FIRST WE'LL LOOK AT AXELLON--LONG THE SUPREME POWER OF THIS SOLAR SYSTEM, AN ADVANCED TECHNOCRACY WHOSE POTENTIAL ONCE RECOGNIZED NO LIMITS.

"IN THE LAST SEVERAL DECADES, HOWEVER, AXELLON HAS COASTED ON FORMER GLORY--AND ITS PRE-EMINENCE HAS CONSEQUENTLY SLIPPED.

"UPON MATURATION, GIANTS SEEM TO YEARN FOR THE FALL--ENTROPHY ONE SUPPOSES.



"ONCE RATHER PRIMITIVE AND HELD UP TO RIDICULE BY THE OTHER WORLDS OF YOUR SYSTEM, IT HAS LATELY ADVANCED AT A STUNNING RATE, LARGELY DUE TO MILITARY PRESSURES.

"NOW, HAVING CAUGHT THE GIANT SLEEPING, BALSAMO ACTUALLY RIVALS AXELLON IN RAW POWER.

"IT MAY, IN FACT, HAVE ALREADY SUPERSEDED AXELLON.

"A DETERMINATION COULD BE ACHIEVED ONLY BY WAR..."

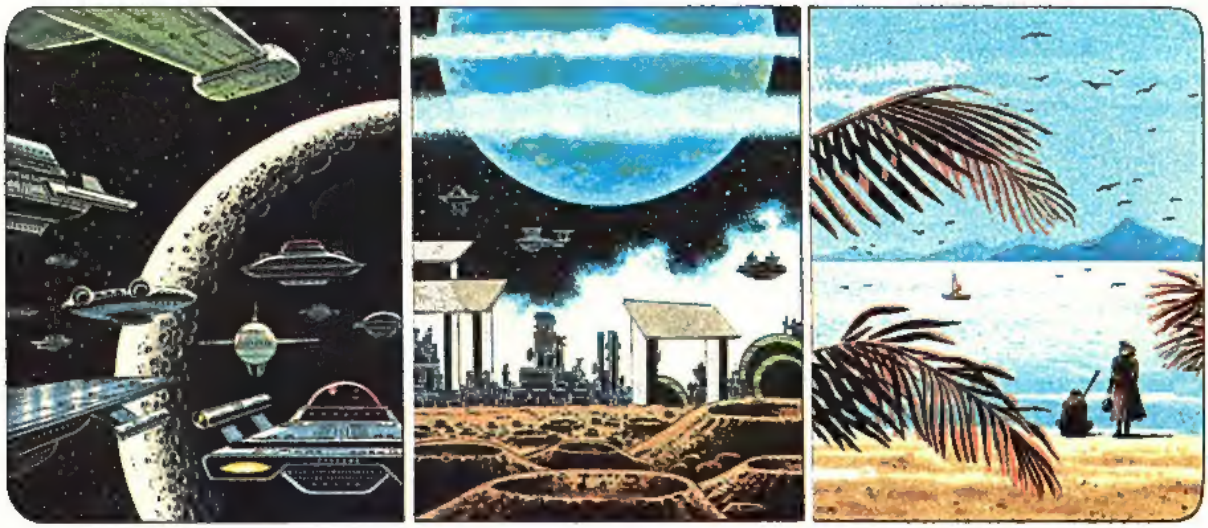
THAT'S A LIE! MY WORLD DOES NOT WANT WAR!
INDEED, BALSAMO HAS APPOINTED ME HEAVENSTONE EMISSARY TO PREVENT THE WAR AXELLON IS BENT ON CAUSING!

WHO ARE YOU, SIRIAN, TO COME HALFWAY ACROSS THE UNIVERSE MOUTHING SUCH INSULTING ABSURDITY?
PLEASE, AMBASSADOR--CONTAIN YOUR OUTBURSTS UNTIL MY BRIEFING HAS CONCLUDED. NOW...THE THIRD WORLD IN THIS UNFORTUNATE TRIANGLE--

"--THE MOON CALLED HEAVENSTONE.

"AS YOU KNOW, IT IS THE SECOND HOME OF RELIGIOUS FANATICS--OR DEEPLY FERVENT SPIRITUALISTS, IF YOU WILL, WHO STRIVE FOR SIMPLE HARMONY WITH THE ENVIRONMENT.

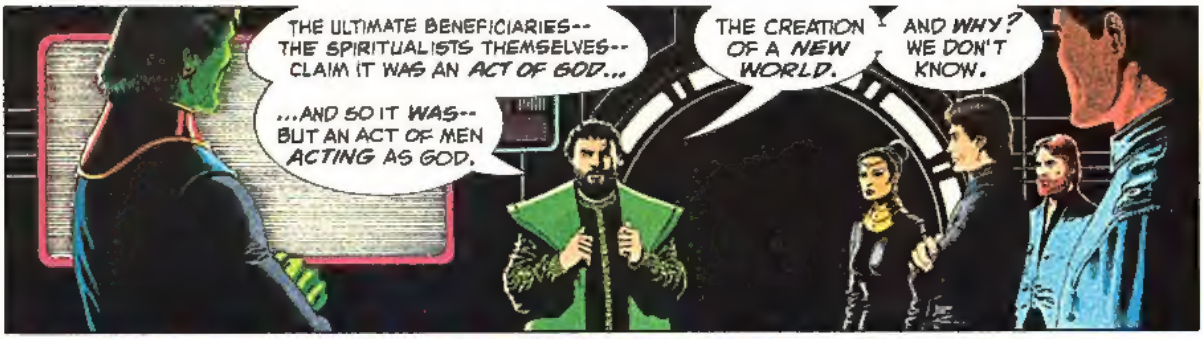
"BEFORE THEY FIRST ARRIVED, HEAVENSTONE WAS NO MORE THAN A COLD, UNNAMED BALL OF ROCK--LIKE MOST PLANETARY SATELLITES...



"BUT SOME FIFTY AXELLON YEARS AGO, THE DEAD ROCK WAS MIRACULOUSLY SCULPTED INTO A HABITABLE WORLD. OXYGEN AND HYDROGEN WERE INJECTED TO CREATE A SHEATHE OF ATMOSPHERE. RAINS WERE ORCHESTRATED.

" SEAS AND LAKES AND RIVERS SOON TOOK SHAPE SOIL WAS FORMED. PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES WERE CAREFULLY INTRODUCED TO THE BURGEONING ECOSPHERE.

"AND, FINALLY, TO SOME WAYS OF THINKING, DEATH BLOSSOMED INTO PARADISE. NOW, THIS WAS ALL ACCOMPLISHED BY PRIVATE CONTRACTORS -- INCLUDING YOUR GREAT— GRANDFATHER, AMBASSADOR -- AT STAGGERING COST, AND THE SOURCE OF THE FUNDING REMAINS SECRET TO THIS DAY."


THE ULTIMATE BENEFICIARIES-- THE SPIRITUALISTS THEMSELVES-- CLAIM IT WAS AN ACT OF GOD...
...AND SO IT WAS-- BUT AN ACT OF MEN ACTING AS GOD.
THE CREATION OF A NEW WORLD.
AND WHY? WE DON'T KNOW.

"BEFORE HEAVENSTONE WAS CREATED, THE PERSECUTED SPIRITUALISTS--AT THAT TIME, ALL OF THEM NATIVE AXELLONS LIVING ON AXELLON-- WERE A WRETCHED MINORITY WHO SIMPLY WISHED TO BE LEFT ALONE IN PURSUIT OF THE DISSENTING BELIEFS.

"THE AXELLON GOVERNMENT INTERPRETED THE SPIRITUALISTS AS NONPRODUCTIVE, DANGEROUS, AND UNDESIRABLE ELEMENTS IN A TECHNOCRATIC SOCIETY.

"IF THE MINORITY COULD NOT CONTRIBUTE TO AXELLON'S PREVAILING WAY OF LIFE, THEN THEIR LIVES WERE DEEMED FORFEIT.

"THE SPIRITUALISTS WERE, IN FACT, NEARLY PURGED.

"IT DID NOT REQUIRE A PROPHET TO REALIZE THAT THEIR ONLY FEASIBLE DESTINY LAY **OFF-PLANET**, REMOVED FROM THE PERSECUTION OF AXELLON AND EVERY OTHER FUTURE-MINDED GOVERNMENT SAVE THEIR OWN.

"AND THAT'S WHEN, AS IF IN ANSWER TO THEIR PRAYERS, HEAVENSTONE WAS CREATED.

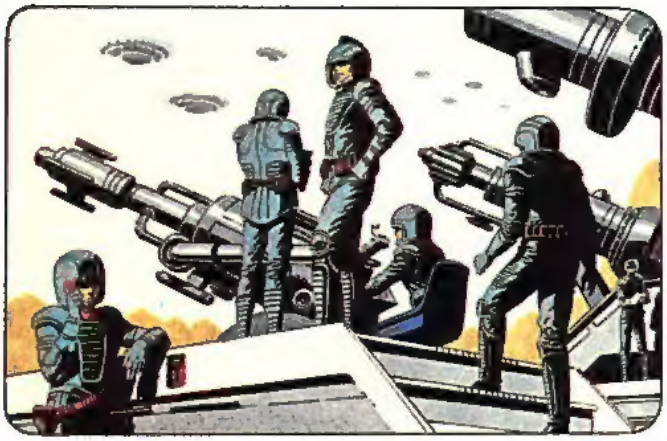
"THE SURVIVING SPIRITUALISTS EMBARKED ON A MASS EXODUS TO THE NEW WORLD, AND THE AXELLON GOVERNMENT--THOUGH STILL PONDERING THE **FUNDING** OF THAT NEW WORLD--WERE ONLY TOO GLAD TO SAY GOOD RIDDANCE.

"THE MOVEMENT, BY THE WAY, WAS FOUNDED SOME SIXTY YEARS AGO BY FIVE ALMOST MAGICALLY CHARISMATIC, DEEPLY SPIRITUAL LEADERS.

"EVEN AT THE VERY BEGINNING, LONG BEFORE THE PURGE STARTED, THE AXELLON GOVERNMENT SENSED TROUBLE BREWING--FOR IT WAS SAID THAT AT TIMES THE FIVE LEADERS ACTUALLY 'GLOWED.'

"FOR SOME REASON, AFTER BLESSING THE EXODUS, THESE FIVE CHOSE TO REMAIN BEHIND ON AXELLON, PRESUMABLY IN HIDING."

WE KNOW WHERE THEY ARE RIGHT NOW--INDEED, YOUR COMPUTER HOLDS THEIR PRECISE COORDINATES--BUT THEY ARE SAID TO BE... "UNREACHABLE."
STILL, NOW KNOWN AS THE **FIVE ELDERS OF LIGHT**, THEY COULD WELL PROVE TO BE THE KEY TO ANY SUCCESSFUL RESOLUTION OF THE PRESENT CONFLICT.
AND NOW WE COME TO THE RECENT PAST, AND THE **CAUSE** OF THE CURRENT DISPUTE...
FOR THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS, ARMADAS OF BALSAMO SHIPS HAVE BEEN LEAVING YOUR PLANET, AMBASSADOR, IN EVER GREATER NUMBERS... ON AN EXODUS OF THEIR **OWN**, IT WOULD SEEM...



"TIME AND AGAIN THEIR DESTINATION HAS BEEN **HEAVENSTONE**, AND THEIR CARGO HAS BEEN **PARTICLE BEAM WEAPONS**--ENOUGH OF THEM TO WAGE WAR.

"AXELLON IS UNDERSTANDABLY NERVOUS ABOUT SO MUCH DEATH HOVERING DIRECTLY OVER THEIR HEADS.

"THEIR EMPHATIC POSITION IS THAT THE BALSAMO MILITARY HAS ENCROACHED FAR TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT, AND THEY DEMAND COMPLETE RECLAMATION OF THEIR MOON FROM THE SPIRITUALIST INHABITANTS.

"YOUR GOVERNMENT ON BALSAMO NATURALLY DENIES ALL CHARGES, COUNTERCHARGING THAT AXELLON IS MERELY LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE TO RESUME ITS INTERRUPTED PURGE OF THE SPIRITUALISTS.

"AND THEY HAVE FURTHERMORE VOWED TO HELP DEFEND THE SPIRITUALISTS FROM ANY RECLAMATION ATTEMPTS. THUS THE PROPHECY PROMISES TO BECOME SELF-FULFILLING."

IF BALSAMO HAS INDEED STATIONED PARBEAMS ON HEAVENSTONE, THEN AXELLON COULD BE EFFECTIVELY OBLITERATED WITHIN A MATTER OF MOMENTS--AT NO REAL RISK TO BALSAMO.
AXELLON RETALIATION WOULD BE TOO LATE AND ESSENTIALLY FUTILE, BUT WOULD OF COURSE ENTIRELY DEMOLISH HEAVENSTONE--
--REVERTING IT TO ITS FORMER STATUS AS A DEAD BALL OF ROCK, THIS TIME HAUNTED BY THE TWELVE MILLION SOULS OF SPIRITUALISTS SENT TOO EARLY TO THEIR FINAL REWARD.

SIX FROM SIRIUS CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE. ON SALE THE LAST WEEK IN JUNE.